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ABSTRACT

This document reports on a symposium held to analyze major obstacles hampering the equality of educational opportunity for girls and women and to exchange experiences and information on efforts to remove such obstacles and improve access. The welcoming speech by K. Savolainen is outlined, and other proceedings are briefly discussed. The summary of trends, experiences, information, and views expressed during the symposium highlights these areas: women's progress and remaining problems; traditional ideologies that portray women as inferior; the negative consequences of war, racism, and economic crises; illiteracy and lack of skills training as obstacles to women's educational and employment opportunities; family responsibilities; regression in women's interest in academic education; concentration of women in traditionally female jobs; the need to consider any specific educational strategy within its economic, political, and cultural context; the importance of nonformal education; the need for research, exchange of information, and communication; and the need for women's active participation in decision making. Based upon their conclusions, a list of suggestions are made for the Director General of UNESCO. An agenda and an annotated agenda which enlarges upon the symposium's five main discussion points are appended. (YLB)

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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

ON

THE RIGHT OF WOMEN TO EDUCATION WITH A VIEW TO THEIR ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

Unesco, Paris, 14-18 September 1987

FINAL REPORT

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I. BACKGROUND OF THE SYMPOSIUM

1. In pursuance of Unesco's Approved Programme and Budget for 1986-1987, and within the framework of the Programme "Equality of Educational Opportunity for Girls and Women" - a component of the Major Programme II "Education for All" - an International Symposium on the Right of Women to Education with a View of Their Access to Employment was held at Unesco Headquarters from 14 to 18 September 1987 in order to :

(i) analyse major obstacles hampering the realization of the equality of educational opportunity for girls and women especially with a view to their access to employment ;

(ii) exchange experiences and information on efforts to remove such obstacles and to improve the access by girls and women especially to technical, scientific and vocational education leading to employment.

2. The International Labour Office (ILO), through its representative, co-operated actively in the preparation of the Symposium and in its discussions. The Symposium was attended by specialists from 13 countries, representatives of non-governmental organizations, 2 consultants and individual observers. For the Agenda and the list of participants see Appendix I and II.

II. PROCEEDINGS

3. The Director of the Division of Equality of Educational Opportunity and Special Programmes, Ms. K. Savolainen, opened the Symposium. On behalf of the Director-General of Unesco, she welcomed the participants, the representative of the International Labour Office and the observers from non-governmental organizations. After reviewing major obstacles hampering women's access to education for employment and Unesco's contributions to the removal of such obstacles, she outlined the Organization's foreseen programme in this field and, as a framework for action, emphasized the importance of the normative instruments and policy documents such as :

- the Unesco Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education (1960) ;

- the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (1967) ;

- the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) ;

- the ILO Conventions and Recommendations related to women workers' questions and to equal opportunities of men and women in employment ;

- the Unesco Revised Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education (1974) ;

- the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985).

4. The Symposium elected Mrs Y. Hammoutene (Algeria) as Chairperson, Mrs R. Saulle (Italy), Mrs S. Raicheva (Bulgaria), Mrs M. Fila (Congo), Mrs L.E. de Vegas (Venezuela) as Vice-chairpersons, and Mrs J. Gaskell (Canada) as Rapporteur.

5. The representative of ILO, Mrs R. Smirnova, Director of the Office for Women Workers Questions, presented ILO's programme and policies in the fields of training and employment of women, and in the promotion of equality of opportunity and rights of women workers.

6. The Assistant Coordinator of the Programmes relating to the Status of Women, Mrs A. Souyris de Saint Brice, briefed the Symposium on Unesco's programme for the promotion of women and on activities carried out as an intersectoral approach under Major Programme XIV "The Status of Women".

7. The Chief of the Section of Equality of Educational Opportunity for Girls and Women, Mrs F. Nuovo, described Unesco policy and programmes to promote the equality of educational opportunities for girls and women in all fields, types and levels of education. She added that the suggestions formulated by the Symposium would be examined by the Secretariat in view of follow-up actions.

8. The Symposium's discussions were based on two reference documents prepared by Mrs F. Best and Mrs A. Braun who also presented them. All participants and numerous representatives of non-governmental organizations orally reported on their experiences and work in their respective countries and organizations. Most reports were also presented in writing.

III. SUMMARY OF TRENDS, EXPERIENCES, INFORMATION AND VIEWS EXPRESSED DURING THE SYMPOSIUM

9. The Symposium discussed both the progress women have made and the problems that remain. While the importance of women's contributions to the development of their society, to economic production and social relations was stressed, it was nevertheless recognized that their equality-although proclaimed in theory and stipulated by law - left much to be desired in practice. In short, the gap between women's equality <u>de jure</u> and <u>de facto</u> is still wide in both developing and developed countries.

10. In many countries, women continue to confront ideologies that portray them as inferior and untrustworthy, as belongings of their husband or father and as sex symbols or means of reproduction for the society. Young women too often internalize these views, seeing themselves as weak and less capable than they are. That women must learn to be more enterprizing and assertive, to have confidence and to strive for economic independence and self-reliance was emphasized by the participants who reported what obstacles in this respect are still faced in their local situations. Despite efforts to eradicate sex stereotypes and discrimination, one report said, the prevailing attitudes and behavior, based on historical and cultural traditions continue to have a negative impact on girls. Another report stated that in some families with traditional thinking patterns, parents may believe that education is not necessary for girls, who consequently are kept at home for housework and watch their younger brothers and sisters. Even if women's rights to education and employment are legally guaranteed, certain cultural obstacles continue to persist, another report said, and should women have an opportunity for employment, they - unlike men - still have to prove their competence.

11. Recognizing that the expansion of women's educational and employment opportunities depend, as do men's, on peace and economic development, the participants emphasized the negative consequences of war, racism and apartheid, military dictatorship, famine and economic crises. Gainful employment of women being an important basis for their equality, it was noted that an uncertain economic climate means fluctuating economic opportunities for women, who suffer disproportionately from unemployment, underemployment and reduced economic growth. At times of economic downturn, most governments are inclined to make budgetary cuts in the sectors of educational and social investments. Since women are directly and indirectly affected, efforts should be made to counteract such cuts.

12. Illiteracy and lack of skills training were identified as a major obstacle to women's educational and employment opportunities. Progress made in this respect has been uneven insofar as considerable differences exist not only between countries at different levels of development but also within individual countries between urban-rural, skilled-unskilled and literate-illiterate women. The necessity of providing training programmes for the less advantaged women, notably the illiterate and handicapped, was stressed. For rural areas where women are the main producers of food for their families, the training for better agricultural production was emphasized in one report.

13. Several participants pointed out that although economic and educational structures have changed, family responsibilities have not, so that women are still expected to shoulder the major responsibilities of family life. While women's work within the family constitutes an enormous contribution to the society as a whole, women themselves make less progress in economic and professional life because of their dual workroles; very often young women fail to enroll in schools, and if they do attend, they tend to drop out to take care of their younger brothers and sisters, thus, abandoning their education earlier than most young men do. Among other factors leading to

premature drop-outs are, for example, early pregnancies. Establishment of day care centers and other social services was considered crucial for the elimination of obstacles to women's education. Still, the problem of double work role seems to remain resulting occasionally, in a decline of the birth rate and in an increase of the divorce rate.

14. Equal access to education was seen as an important road leading to higher positions, respect and employment. Although there has been in the past 20 years an exponential growth in women's enrolment in educational institutions at a rate faster than that of men, many women still have no access to education. While some participants reported progress in girls' enrolment in non-traditional fields of study, also signs of regression were identified insofar as the girls' interest in academic education has decreased over the past few years faster than that of boys. Where they have access to education, young women tend to enroll in traditionally female courses such as household sciences, languages and secretarial training, avoiding, for example, courses in mathematics, physical science and technology. It was considered important that mechanisms be put in place to increase women's participation in non-traditional courses and programmes and in non-traditional and new employments; men's participation in traditionally female activities was also mentioned. At any rate, whatever gains girls and women may have achieved, the participants were not convinced that these will persist in the uncertain economic climate of today.

15. The concentration of women in traditionally female jobs and at lower levels of employment makes them particularly vulnerable to structural changes in employment accompanying rapid technological change and economic downturn. Therefore, training must have greater labour market relevance and keep with technological change; as the situation stands now, one report said, girls narrow their career options through their choices of school subjects early in their education. However, there is concern that encouraging women to move into non-traditional education and employment should not mean a devaluation of their traditional work roles, for example, in the humanities, teaching and clerical jobs; there women's salaries should be commensurate with their skills and experiences. Legislation to promote "equal pay for work of equal value" is designed to achieve this aim, as another report underlined.

16. It was noted that any specific educational strategy must be considered within its economic, political and cultural context. What may be appropriate in one country may be inappropriate or unacceptable in another, and what works in one school must be, before adoption elsewhere, carefully tested. The issue of coeducation, for example, was debated and regarded by many as an important step towards equality. However, in some countries, it is culturally inappropriate for boys and girls to be educated together. On the other hand, some research suggests that in subjects such as science and technology girls may well experience greater success in a single-sex school or classroom. Crucial and essential to the participants was, nevertheless, that girls and women have the same educational opportunities as boys and men.

17. Several participants stressed the importance of non-formal education to women both in urban and rural areas; because of their potentially flexible structures, non-formal programmes may better meet the special needs emanating from women's life conditions, better suit to their time schedules and be made more easily available. However, it was felt that the content of both formal and non-formal education was often inappropriate for women because it ignored women's experiences and their role in history and lacked relevance to their lives. In addition to curriculum change needed notably in literacy programmes, formal education and higher education, the importance of introducing women role models throughout the educational system was underlined. Continuing education programmes for women by women themselves were initiated in several countries. Sex stereotypes were considered to be a major obstacle, whereby concern was expressed that teachers and guidance counsellors were not adequately prepared to confront and overcome that obstacle. Therefore, one report urged, training of teachers to understand the problem of sexism and to combat it in their own classrooms must be part of the intervention for change.

18. If changes toward greater equality are to be effected, the participants argued, then research, exchange of information and communication will have to be centrally involved. Especially important is to communicate and share experiences and knowledge of successful efforts so that others, with similar concerns and objectives, can profit from them within the framework of national, international and North-South cooperation. Availability of relevant statistics and their up-dating was singled out as an essential factor facilitating change processes. In one report, action-research to change teacher behavior was called for at all levels of education. Research and action to improve women's opportunities in education and training may have been undertaken at the local level but may not be readily accessible to women even in other parts of the same country, much less in other parts of the world, said another report.

19. A necessary condition for the improvement of women's equality, it was generally felt, is that women themselves actively participate in decision-making in all fields of life. Although there are large numbers of women involved in education as teachers, parents and students, only very few of them are in the highest or in higher positions of influence, responsibility and decision-making. Consequently, positive action should be taken to ensure that women have a fair share of positions of responsibility at all levels of education. It has become evident, a report concluded, that simply providing a means for equal opportunity does not result in equal outcomes.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

20. The participants of the Symposium,

Convinced of women's crucial role in and contribution to all fields of development ;

Concerned that the inevitable condition for their wider participation in development is still hampered by inequality of educational opportunity notably in the field of technical, scientific and vocational education preventing their equal access to employment opportunities ;

Recognizing the alarming situation in which millions of women continue to live in various parts of the world ;

Stressing the importance of the international instruments established to ameliorate the above situation, notably, the Unesco Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education; the Unesco Revised Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education; the ILO Conventions and Recommendations; the United Nations Declaration of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the World Plan of Action of the World Conference of the International Women's Year; and the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women ;

Realizing that inspite of progress made, a gap continues to exist between women's right de jure and de facto ;

conclude and suggest to the Director General of Unesco to take appropriate measures in order that :

1. The cooperation between ILO and Unesco be strengthened for the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies as well as of the International Conventions and Recommendations mentioned above; and an emphasis be placed on research and dissemination of information related to

   (i) the obstacles women face in entering non-traditional and male-dominated education and employment ;

   (ii) the obstacles women face in obtaining access to higher level jobs of responsibility and decision-making in education ;

   (iii) the employment of women in fields of new technology, and the different positions occupied by women and men in such fields in order to determine needs for training and stimulate projects leading to equal employment opportunities and income generation.

2. Unesco and other international organizations give more support to non-governmental organizations involved in the promotion of women's education and development, particularly in rural areas, and encourage local initiatives to identify, plan, execute and evaluate programmes for women.

3. Unesco assist Member States to ensure that educational planners have a better understanding of women's issues in order to relate policies and programmes to the specific requitements of women workers in all sectors, to ensure their equal access to resources and to increase their capacity to participate in national development. The establishment of women's committees or ministries of women's affairs will help ensure women have influence in policy and planning.

4. Unesco continue to increase its assistance to women through functional literacy, post-literacy and non-formal training programmes reinforcing the integration and participation of women in active political and social life. The projects to that effect should :

(i) focus on the training of literacy personnel and their sensitization to the problems faced by women in different situations ;

(ii) emphasize work prospects for women, especially developing their professional and productive skills, informing them about possibilities for self-employment and access to credit ;

(iii) develop programme contents relevant to the cultural, economic and social environment of the women involved ;

(iv) stress positive images of women in training materials and encourage women to exercise their civic rights and seek leadership positions.

5. Unesco help Member States evaluate and revise their national vocational training policies to determine how effectively they meet the training requirements of girls and women in relation to their access to employment in all sectors. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that girls and women have equal access to training, in formal and non-formal education, for and in the new technologies.

6. Unesco provide assistance to Member States and non-governmental organizations for the development of centres of information and educational and vocational counselling and guidance that better serve the needs of girls and women ; and that such services be improved by

(i) strengthening the training of counsellors in order to increase their understanding of the diversity of job choices girls and women can make ;

(ii) involving parents, educators and employers in a counselling and guidance relation that goes beyond the period of formal schooling ;

(iii) helping women develop attitudes of more independence and assertiveness.

7. Member States review their science and technical education programmes so that these ensure women's equal participation and better correspond to women's and girls' life experiences. Unesco should continue to gather information about the already existing research on women's access to science

and technology education, and about successful experiences and programmes in this field in order to make that information available to Member States, international and non-governmental organizations.

8. Member States encourage enterprises, firms and organizations to establish appropriate and practical on-the-job training for women, especially in new technology areas, and linked to education programmes.

9. Member States review and revise their pre-service and in-service training programmes for teachers and other educational personnel to ensure that these emphasize the importance of unbiased teacher behavior towards girls, and that teachers encourage girls to undertake technical, scientific and vocational studies; and that Unesco carry out research on the attitudes and behavior of teachers in relation to sex stereotypes and their impact on the educational choice and success of female students and that its results be disseminated to Member States.

10. Information for women and about women's role in development be made more widely available, in particular,

(i) that the mass media be encouraged to play a more effective and positive role in changing attitudes more favourable towards women's active role in society as equal partners with men ;

(ii) that the mass media, particularly in developing countries, include specific programmes dealing with girls' and women's educational and employment problems and help overcome them ;

(iii) that handbooks be prepared to inform women about their rights encouraging them to assume a more assertive role in society ;

(iv) that various organizations and associations dealing with youth, such as the Associated Schools of Unesco, be involved to promote women's right to education with a view to employment.

A P P E N D I X I

AGENDA

1. Opening of the Symposium.

2. Election of the Bureau.

3. Development and trends related to education providing girls and women with competencies and qualifications for employment : progress and problems (Presentation by the Unesco Secretariat and the International Labor Office on their recent activities).

4. Review of development in Member States concerning women's access to education for employment and efforts made to overcome obstacles faced (Presentation by the participants).

5. Aspects proposed for Symposium discussion.*

   5.1 Removing socio-economic and cultural obstacles preventing women from gaining access to education for employment.

   5.2 Towards literacy and women's integration into socio-economic and cultural mainstream.

   5.3 Towards improved information and educational/vocational guidance for women.

   5.4 Implications on educational policies, structures, contents and methods.

   5.5 Towards women's equal access to education for employment.

6. Suggestions for national action and international co-operation with a view to :

   - eliminate stereotypes and prejudices hampering women's access to education for employment ;

   - facilitate, through literacy and other relevant training, their integration into socio-economic and cultural life ;

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* Based on two reference documents :
"Women's right to education" by Francine Best (ED-87/CONF.809/COL.1)
"Women's right to education with a view to their access to employment" by Agnès Braun (ED-87/CONF.809/COL.2).

- provide girls and women with adequate information and educational / vocational guidance facilitating the choice and development of their careers and employment ;

- render educational policies, structures, contents and methods more relevant to women's educational and vocational aspirations, in order to

- guarantee full implementation of women's right to education with a view to securing their access to employment of their choice.

7. Closing session.

ANNOTATED AGENDA

1. **Removing socio-economic and cultural obstacles preventing women from gaining access to education for employment** (point 5.1 of the Agenda)

Women's right to education is in itself not sufficient unless it is duly respected and globally implemented by the society in which they live. The gap between theory and practice, women's right de jure and de facto, may vary from country to country, in the most unfortunate case, amounting to their "right" to be totally ignored. In many cases, they remain poorly integrated in the nation's socio-economic, political and cultural mainstream or outside it altogether. The reasons are undoubtedly to be sought in that same mainstream, in its historical, social, economic, cultural, religious and other aspects.

Since the reasons are well-known, our task ahead is to exchange ideas and experiences as to ways and means of removing still prevailing obstacles to girls' and women's access to education for employment. In such attempts, for example, the role of mass media and women's active participation in societal activities is of vital importance.

Reference documents : n°1 (A. Braun) pp. 4-8, 9-11, 34-40.
(English) n°2 (F. Best) pp. 7-13, 14-18.

In the light of the reference documents and their own experiences, the participants may wish to address themselves to issues such as :

- examination of the effectiveness of action taken until now towards the elimination of sex stereotypes and prejudices concerning the access of girls and women to education for employment ;

- identification of effective ways and means, in the light of past experience, to bring changes in the public image as to girls' and women's role in occupational life. The role of mass media ?

- identification of priority activities for women themselves, local communities, governmental, non-governmental and international organizations to remove socio-economic and cultural obstacles.

2. **Towards literacy and women's integration into socio-economic and cultural mainstream** (point 5.2 of the Agenda)

Women's integration into the nation's socio-economic and cultural mainstream as equal partners to men is seriously hampered by their lower literacy level and their largely inadequate technical, scientific and vocational training. In the worst situation are probably young girls living in rural areas who may lack not only adequate formal and non-formal education

but also the mainstream into which to integrate. Here education emerges as a moral equivalent of freedom to shape one's life in a socio-economically and culturally meaningful context. If literacy is women's basic right, what is it a right for ?

Reference documents : n°1 (A. Braun) pp. 21-24
(English) n°2 (F. Best) pp. 26-28, 30.

In the light of the reference documents and their own experiences, the participants may wish to address themselves to issues such as :

- elimination of obstacles and resistance to literacy for girls and women, and an analysis of possible weaknesses or mistakes in the approaches used until now in literacy and functional literacy work ;

- possible re-orientation of literacy work for girls and women to facilitate their integration into the nation's socio-economic mainstream ;

- identification of priority activities for women themselves, local communities, governmental, non-governmental and international organizations to intensify literacy campaigns.

3. Towards improved information and educational/vocational guidance for women (point 5.3 of the Agenda)

Choice of one's career is notoriously a difficult task especially when there appear obstacles to one's vocational aspirations and interests. Problems are faced notably among girls in the formative years preceding, coinciding and following efforts to establish their careers in the socio-economic structure traditionally favoring "male skills". The importance of information, educational and vocational guidance services is here highly accentuated, as is also the re-orientation of teacher-training.

Reference documents : n°1 (A. Braun) pp. 17-18
(English) n°2 (F. Best) pp. 19-22

In the light of the reference documents and their own experiences, the participants may wish to address themselves to issues such as :

- identification of ways and means of establishing new or improving existing information, guidance and counseling services to help inform girls and women of possible careers related to employment and self-employment, motivate and encourage them to choose such careers and guide their training towards competency in them ;

- training of educational and vocational guidance personnel and re-orientation of teacher-training towards greater awareness among teachers of technical, scientific and vocational careers for girls and women ;

- identification of action for women themselves, local communities, governmental, non-governmental and international organizations to help, for example, by means of mass media change attitudes more favorable to women's careers in fields previously dominated by men, and to help establish new or render existing educational and vocational guidance and placement services more relevant to women's educational and vocational aspirations.

4. Aspirations on educational policies, structures, contents and methods. (point 5.4 of the Agenda)

Implementation of women's right to education with a view to their access to employment necessarily presupposes changes in educational policies, structures, content and methods of teaching-learning. Obviously, the question is not only of gaining access to technical, scientific and vocational training for girls and women but also of gaining equal chances of success in it. The latter being decisive for their successful careers, it is essential that the built-in and male-favoring aspects and atmosphere during training periods do not constitute another type of "hidden discrimination" possibly leading to poor performance on the part of female students. Failure in traditionally male-dominated fields of education is likely to reinforce already existing stereotypes regarding "male" and "female" jobs. Hence, access and success are two sides of the same issue at hand to be taken into account by the providers of technical, scientific and vocational training.

Reference documents : n°1 (A. Braun) pp. 18-20, 24-25, 27-30
(English) n°2 (F. Best) pp. 30-32.

In the light of the reference documents and their own experiences, the participants may wish to address themselves to issues such as :

- identification of changes required - both in formal and non-formal education - in terms of educational policies, structures and curriculum development including contents, methods and techniques, materials, examination systems, etc.. in order not only to facilitate girls' and women's access to technical, scientific and vocational training but to prepare their readiness for it already in early stages of their formal schooling ;

- elimination of possible "hidden discrimination" in structures and programmes likely to discourage female participation in technical, scientific and vocational studies ;

- identification of priority actions for women themselves, local communities, governmental, non-governmental and international organizations as related to new education opportunities, within formal and non-formal education, for girls and women interested in technical, scientific and vocational training.

5. **Towards women's equal access to education for employment** (point 5.5 of the Agenda)

Two different - although interrelated issues - present themselves here for discussion ; girls' and women's access to and success in technical, scientific and vocational training on the one hand, and their access to jobs commensurate with the level of training received, on the other. Whereas women's right to education is formally guaranteed when all girls and women are given the opportunity to study what they want, their discrimination may nevertheless continue when they, with the same qualifications, fail to obtain the same posts as men, or - as is frequently the case - fail to receive equal salary for equal work. Measures to be taken are therefore twofold, to remove obstacles to women's access to and success in technical, scientific and vocational training, and, to eliminate women's discrimination on the job market. Although the latter involves several other societal measures, among them legislation to uproot job discrimination, education continues to play an essential role in such efforts. Its role is also important in promoting women's self-employment and other income-generating activities.

Reference documents : n°1 (A. Braun) pp. 12-17, 34-37, 39-40
(English) n°2 (F. Best) pp..19-22, 29-32.

In the light of the reference documents and their own experiences, the participants may wish to address themselves to issues such as :

- identification of ways and means of eliminating obstacles and resistance to the entry of girls and women to technical, scientific and vocational training and to their freedom to choose careers according to their interests and abilities. Possible measures to facilitate their success in their chosen careers and their involvement in self-employment as an expression of self-fulfilment and self-reliance ?

- identification of education's role in the elimination of discrimination against women on the job market. Education's contribution towards : equal qualification = equal job and salary ? The contribution of mass media to that end ?

- possible activities proposed for women themselves, local communities, governmental, non-governmental and international organizations to help overcome obstacles to equality of sexes concerning training and employment.

APPENDIX II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. MEMBER STATES

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